

Using the speed of sound

By [Andreas Furtner](#)

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The human brain only needs 146msecs to react to sound. This is faster than touch (149 msec), sight (189msecs) and taste (500 msec). Think about bone-chilling scenes in horror movies, they only work if the sound is placed just after the visual imagery. Otherwise, the sound will give the surprise away, because the brain processes it faster than the visual stimuli.



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Although it probably seems obvious that music can evoke emotions, it is to this day, not 100% clear why. But scientists put it down to that music has been culturally created to sound like an emotionally expressive human. While it is not easy for us to see the human ingredients in the modulations of pitch, intensity, tempo and rhythm that make music, perhaps it is obvious to our auditory homunculus.

Focused, visceral, interactive and efficient

Sound is already used extensively in events, but it's the next frontier in terms of experience design because of it's focused, visceral, interactive and efficient.

At the recent launch of the Isuzu brand in Port Elizabeth, sound was used to add 'oomph' to the great reveal. The brand's theme music, which is Japanese in style, morphed into an unexpected hip-hop track. By adding the unexpected you create the wow and build anticipation. Using technology, including the placement of speakers, you can bring a creative idea to life. Event directors can impregnate the live, in-person visual experience with far more meaning by using sound and acoustic trickery, compared to relying purely on visuals.

There is semiotics to sound. Strings convey warmth and scale, trumpets sound triumphant and so on. If you watch the BBC News, take note of the opening theme, there's urgency created by the rhythm, the gravitas of the coming content is highlighted with a degree of importance through trumpets and scale with the strings.

So how do you pick the right music?

Picking the right music

There's no formula, you simply have to consider what you're objective is, the occasion, the visual it's connected to, the

desired ambience and then sift through the right genre to find the right fit. Sometimes it may take more than just one kind of music to create the desired mood. For instance, the music for an event might follow something like this:

- General, subtle background music for the pre-event scene—setting. This could be just light music with no vocals, theme music or orchestral depending on your event. Music fills the gap between visual, light and activity.
- Introduction could be something more daring. If your event is geared towards attracting a younger crowd, then hip-hop, club mixes and electronics would be a good choice. A good thumping beat is a great crowd puller. On the other hand, if it is a corporate occasion, you might want to consider something motivating or energising.
- Banging club mixes with a good DJ is ideal for daring, innovative product launches, keeping the momentum in the music builds anticipation. A good bass line with lots of drum play builds curiosity and hype. It makes people want to check out what is happening.

So next time you pull an event together, don't just play your favourite music, think about what you're looking to achieve, how you can flip the expected on its head, and enjoy searching for music that gets emotions flying.

ABOUT ANDREAS FURTNER

Andreas has a great passion for all things audio and for creating out of the ordinary audio-visual experiences. He has qualifications in Audio Engineering and Pedagogy and has for 15 years travelled the globe working as a Sound Engineer with major bands and productions. He has a wealth of knowledge of the music technology industry and is passionate about sharing that knowledge to elevate the local industry to international standards.

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